

Coast Guard to debut new small boat at Little Creek

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The Coast Guard will have a new tool at its disposal for search and rescue missions starting today when it unveils its first "Response Boat-Medium" in Virginia Beach.

The 45-foot boat will make its debut this afternoon at the Coast Guard Station at Little Creek.

But it may not be an entirely new sight to those who ply the waters of Hampton Roads.

After the craft underwent builders' trials in Tacoma, Wash., in February 2007, it was brought here in April for developmental testing and evaluation at Fort Monroe.

The Coast Guard describes the vessel as "multi-mission capable" and expects it to operate in coastal zones, including inshore and inland waterways, as well as open waters of the ocean out to about 50 nautical miles. It will most routinely operate in shallow waters, however.

It is intended to be able to respond rapidly to any Coast Guard mission on very short notice and will conduct patrols and training.

"The Response Boat-Medium will greatly improve Coast Guard readiness and responsiveness throughout the country," Adm. Thad W. Allen, the Coast Guard's commandant, has said previously.

"With this faster and more capable platform, we are putting the right tool for the job in the hands of our people," he said, "as they conduct a broad range of vital Coast Guard missions, including homeland security, search and rescue, and law enforcement."

The boat will replace the Coast Guard's 41-foot utility boat which has been the workhorse of Coast Guard coastal stations for more than 25 years.



The first of the Coast Guard's new 45-foot medium response boats will go into service Monday at the Coast Guard station at Little Creek in Virginia Beach. (Coast Guard photo | Lt. Mark Piber)

The new boats feature twin diesel engines with water jet propulsion providing increased maneuverability. They are capable of speeds in excess of 40 knots (46 miles per hour).

It is capable of handling missions in 30-knot winds, but is designed to weather even more punishing conditions, with gusts to 50 knots. Additionally, it should be able to navigate in rough seas with waves up to 12 feet, the Coast Guard said.

It also has the ability to "self-right" itself, as long as still intact.

Depending on its mission, the boat can be outfitted with mounted machine guns and it includes stowed armament.

For the typical five-member crew, there is a full cabin for protection from the elements that is equipped with "a robust navigation system," heating and air conditioning, shock mitigating seats and a communication system allowing contact with other federal, state and local Homeland Security organizations.

On June 21, 2006, the Coast Guard awarded the RB-M contract to Marinette Marine Corp., based in Manitowoc, Wis., which has partnered with Kvichak Marine Industries of Seattle to build the boats. Construction began in July 2007 at KMI in Kent, Washington.

By the numbers:

- Length overall, 44 feet 10½ inches
- Beam overall, 14 feet 7¾ inches
- Draft, at full load, 3 feet 4 inches
- Displacement, 36,500 pounds
- Speed, 42.5 knots
- Range, 250 nautical miles at 30 knots
- Towing ability, 100 tons
- Twin diesel engines, twin water jet-drive
- Fore and aft machine gun mounts
- Port, starboard and aft recovery platforms
- Infrared camera

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